

Dear reader,

This is an author-produced version of an article published in Mary Lindemann / Jared C. Poley (eds.), *Money in the German-Speaking Lands*. It agrees with the manuscript submitted by the author for publication but does not include the final publisher's layout or pagination.

This chapter appears in a larger collection published by Berghahn Books (<https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/LindemannMoney>).

CITATION: Schnurr, Jan Carsten. 2017. "Luxury and the Nineteenth-Century Württemberg Pietists" In *Money in the German-Speaking Lands*, eds. : Mary Lindemann and Jared C. Poley. New York: Berghahn Books (Spektrum: Publications of the German Studies Association 17), 156–172.

Access to the published version may require subscription.
Published in accordance with the policy of Berghahn Books:
<https://www.berghahnbooks.com/authors/>

Your IxTheo team

Liebe*r Leser*in,

dies ist eine von dem/der Autor*in zur Verfügung gestellte Manuskriptversion eines Aufsatzes, der in Mary Lindemann / Jared C. Poley (Hg.), *Money in the German-Speaking Lands*, erschienen ist. Der Text stimmt mit dem Manuskript überein, das der/die Autor*in zur Veröffentlichung eingereicht hat, enthält jedoch *nicht* das Layout des Verlags oder die endgültige Seitenzählung.

Der Beitrag ist Teil eines von Berghahn Books herausgegebenen Sammelbandes (<https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/LindemannMoney>).

ZITATION: Schnurr, Jan Carsten. 2017. "Luxury and the Nineteenth-Century Württemberg Pietists" In *Money in the German-Speaking Lands*, Hg. : Mary Lindemann and Jared C. Poley. New York: Berghahn Books (Spektrum: Publications of the German Studies Association 17), 156–172.

Die Verlagsversion ist möglicherweise nur gegen Bezahlung zugänglich.
Diese Manuskriptversion wird im Einklang mit der Policy des Verlags Berghahn Books publiziert:
<https://www.berghahnbooks.com/authors/>

Ihr IxTheo-Team

Luxury and the Nineteenth-Century Württemberg Pietists¹

Jan Carsten Schnurr

From Widespread Criticism to Partial Acceptance of Luxury

Luxury, perhaps the most vivid expression of a person's possession of money, has always provoked strong feelings and intense reflection. The condemnation of a luxurious lifestyle has, therefore, a long history. It ranges from classical antiquity through the Christian middle ages to early modern Europe. Among the critics were such diverse figures and movements as Pythagoras, the Cynics and Plato, Chinese Taoists, Sallust, Cicero, Seneca and Tacitus, the church fathers, the medieval mendicant orders, Puritanism, Pietism, and Rousseau.² In the Middle Ages, *luxuria*, meaning primarily "sexual indulgence,"³ was regarded as one of the seven deadly sins. Lutheranism did not cherish asceticism as an ideal and was not opposed to all "worldly" pleasures, but it, too, produced warnings and church ordinances which included prohibitions of luxury.⁴ Among those critical of "luxury" were also Johann Arndt, the father of seventeenth century pietistic Lutheran spirituality, and August Hermann Francke, the head of Halle Pietism.⁵ Thus, the tradition of deploring luxurious living was long and powerful.

In the course of the eighteenth century, however, something changed: "luxury" became an ambivalent term, rather than a pejorative one.⁶ This sea-change came about primarily because the Enlightenment had discovered that self-interest, spending, and consumption could be seen not as ethically deficient behavior but instead as healthy ingredients of a prosperous economy. Thinkers such as Bernard Mandeville (1670–1733) stressed that what might be a vice for the individual could be a benefit for the public, namely as a stimulus for economic growth. "[I]f the wants of Men are innumerable," Mandeville wrote, "then what ought to supply them has no bounds."⁷ The logic here is that desire and

¹ Published as: Jan Carsten Schnurr, "Luxury and the Nineteenth-Century Württemberg Pietists," in *Money in the German-Speaking Lands*, eds. Mary Lindemann and Jared C. Poley (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2017), 156-172. First published in German as: "Luxuskritik in der württembergischen Erweckungsbewegung: Begriffsverwendungen und Argumentationen aus den 1830er bis 1850er Jahren," *Blätter für württembergische Kirchengeschichte* 112 (2012): 131-144.

² See Horst Muehlmann, "Luxus und Komfort: Wortgeschichte und Wortvergleich," (PhD thesis, Bonn University, 1975); Johan Hendrik Jacob van der Pot, *Die Bewertung des technischen Fortschritts: Eine systematische Übersicht der Theorien*, 2 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1985), 1019; Mireille Corbier, "Luxus," *Der Neue Pauly*, 7 (1999): 534-36; Rainer Bernhardt, *Luxuskritik und Aufwandsbeschränkungen in der griechischen Welt* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2003); Ulrich Wyrwa, "Luxus und Konsum: Begriffsgeschichtliche Aspekte," in *Luxus und Konsum: Eine historische Annäherung*, eds. Reinhold Reith and Torsten Meyer (Münster: Waxmann, 2003), 47-60.

³ See Rüdiger Schnell, *Frauendiskurs, Männerdiskurs, Ehediskurs: Textsorten und Geschlechterkonzepte in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 1998), 158, 204-05.

⁴ See Werner Elert, *Morphologie des Luthertums, 2: Soziallehren und Sozialwirkungen des Luthertums* (reprint; Munich: Beck, 1953), 499.

⁵ See Martin Brecht, "Das Aufkommen der neuen Frömmigkeitsbewegung in Deutschland," in *Geschichte des Pietismus*, 1, ed. Martin Brecht (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993): 113-203, here 132; Brecht, "August Hermann Francke und der Hallische Pietismus," in *Geschichte des Pietismus*, 1: 440-539, here 466.

⁶ See Wyrwa, "Luxus und Konsum," 49-51.

⁷ See "Luxus," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, 5 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980): 565-69, here 566; John Shovlin, *The Political Economy of Virtue: Luxury, Patriotism, and the Origins of the French Revolution* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), 22; Muehlmann, "Luxus und Komfort," 46-50.

gratification should be affirmed. Voltaire, too, defended luxury by pointing out that the cultural achievements of luxurious Athens had far surpassed those of ascetic Sparta.⁸ Especially after 1770, such views were also expressed in Germany.⁹ Although the older *criticism* of luxury remained present in public debate, the term “luxury” had lost a good part of its negativity. This shift explains why it was now possible to have a periodical such as the German *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* (Journal of luxury and the fashions), which appeared between 1786 and 1827. Even a cleric like the Enlightenment theologian Andreas Riem (1749–1814) criticized the old Protestant Orthodoxy with the rhetorical question, “Who has forgotten it, the clamor from the pulpits against luxury?”¹⁰ Such clamor no longer appeared relevant to him. The way Riem phrased his question indicates that he was not the only one who held this view. Certainly, by the late eighteenth century, “luxury” had become a term that carried positive as well as negative connotations. While the moral criticism of an expensive, pleasure-loving lifestyle continued to sound, people also saw the aesthetic appeal and economic value of such a lifestyle. In their explanations of the concept, nineteenth-century dictionaries accommodated this ambivalent sentiment about luxury.¹¹

Some Key 19th Century Württemberg Pietists

Even in the middle of the nineteenth century, however, some people maintained the older criticism of luxury and used the term solely in a negative manner. Among these was a younger generation of Württemberg pastors of a Pietist persuasion who played a vital role in the German evangelical revival (*Erweckungsbewegung*), including, among others, the publisher, author, and Lutheran pastor from Calw, Christian Gottlob Barth (1799–1862); the editor, educator, and pastor, Johann Ludwig Völter (1809–1888); and the long-time rector of the Stuttgart Collegiate Church (*Stiftskirche*), Sixt Carl Kapff (1805–1879). Several of them had been trained at the *Tübinger Stift*, a college for students of Protestant theology in Tübingen, and they had been inspired by the young revivalist preacher Ludwig Hofacker (1798–1828). They knew each other well. These theologians, who invested their lives in preaching, pastoral care, transnational networking, missionary work and social action, also produced a number of writings on social and historical issues in which the word *Luxus* frequently appeared.¹² These writings provide much information about how the Pietist Protestants in mid nineteenth-century Württemberg thought and felt about the world. Although we should avoid here far-reaching generalizations, nonetheless, the terms and

⁸ See “Luxus,” 567.

⁹ Ibid.; Muehlmann, *Luxus und Komfort*, 53, 55.

¹⁰ Quoted in Thomas K. Kuhn, *Religion und neuzeitliche Gesellschaft: Studien zum sozialen und diakonischen Handeln in Pietismus, Aufklärung und Erweckungsbewegung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 128n287.

¹¹ See Wyrwa, “Luxus und Konsum,” 51–53. According to Muehlmann, *Luxus und Komfort*, 68–69, editions of the *Brockhaus* encyclopedia between 1797 and 1827 granted luxury an increasingly positive value. Thus, the 1827 edition included the statement, “Luxury is a higher degree of affluence adequate to the state of a people’s culture; in its degenerate form, however, pomp and luxuriance. It is a consequence of wealth and springs from the aspiration for the beautification of life.” Similarly Ulrich Christian Pallach observes a “gradual de-ethicization” (“langsame Entmoralisierung”) of *luxe* around the turn of the same century in France (“Luxe,” in *Handbuch politisch-sozialer Grundbegriffe in Frankreich 1680–1820*, eds. Rolf Reichardt and Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, 19 [Munich: Oldenbourg, 2000]: 89–114, here 109).

¹² It would probably be going too far to call it a key concept in the thinking of Württemberg Pietism of the time since the term does not appear in all of their works. It does appear frequently enough, however, to be noteworthy from the standpoint of European intellectual history.

concepts these authors used appear characteristic of the position the Württemberg Pietists took in regard to the question of luxury and its implications.

Luxury in History and Society

In his *General World History according to Biblical Principles* (Die allgemeine Weltgeschichte nach biblischen Grundsätzen), a work of 373 pages published in 1837, which underwent six editions and ten translations, Christian Gottlob Barth describes the rise and fall of empires in terms of their moral and religious qualities.¹³ When he describes them as having a tendency towards luxury, this almost always explains their decline. In the early Roman Republic, Barth believes, “Luxury had not yet displaced the old rough simplicity.”¹⁴ The late Roman Republic, however, suffered from luxury as if it were a “poisonous herb which, slowly but surely, consumed . . . [Rome’s] vitality and prepared its fall.”¹⁵ Luxury here seems to have a deleterious effect on a nation. Such retrospective criticism of luxury can also be found in Pietist historiographers outside Württemberg,¹⁶ rarely, however, as explicitly as among them,¹⁷ and especially so in the writings of Barth. In his *General World History*, the Phoenicians, Lydians, Carthaginians, Romans, Hellenistic Greeks, Byzantines, medieval Italian city states, and the absolutist monarchy of Louis XIV are all criticized for their cultivation of luxury.¹⁸ The Swiss in the days of William Tell, in contrast, are praised for opening “no door to luxury.”¹⁹ When a ruler like Joseph II of Austria “combated luxury with all his strength,” he, too, is given credit for his efforts.²⁰ The emperor Augustus, too, was “an enemy of luxury,”²¹ says Barth and adds that the Romans were happy under his rule. A ruler’s love of luxury is, thus, almost tantamount to the neglect of his duty to care for his subjects.

Ludwig Völter agreed with Barth. In the case of Duke Christopher of Württemberg (1515–1568), however, whom he – like many Pietists – deeply admired, Völter was ready to make excuses. In his textbook *Württemberg: The Land and Its History* (Württemberg: Das Land und seine Geschichte), Völter attributes “wisdom, truly that of a father of the nation,” to

¹³ For an interpretation of the work see Jan Carsten Schnurr, *Weltreiche und Wahrheitszeugen: Geschichtsbilder der protestantischen Erweckungsbewegung in Deutschland 1815–1848* (Göttingen and Oakville, CT: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 197-262.

¹⁴ Christian Gottlob Barth (anon.), *Die allgemeine Weltgeschichte nach biblischen Grundsätzen bearbeitet für nachdenkliche Leser* (Calw: Vereinsbuchhandlung, Stuttgart: Steinkopf, 1837), 92.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁶ E.g., Heinrich Dittmar, *Die deutsche Geschichte in ihren wesentlichen Grundzügen und in einem übersichtlichen Zusammenhange: Ein Leitfadens für die mittlere historische Lehrstufe in Schulen, wie im Selbstunterrichte*, 2nd ed. (Karlsruhe: Holtzmann, 1843 [1st ed. 1840]), 164, 327; Dittmar, *Die Geschichte der Welt vor und nach Christus, mit Rücksicht auf die Entwicklung des Lebens in Religion und Politik, Kunst und Wissenschaft, Handel und Industrie der welthistorischen Völker: Für das allgemeine Bildungsbedürfnis dargestellt*. (Heidelberg: Winter, 1846), 1: 572. See also Wilhelm Hoßbach, *Philipp Jakob Spener und seine Zeit: Eine kirchenhistorische Darstellung* (Berlin: Dümmler, 1828), 2:147-48: “[Spener loved] the greatest simplicity and was so far removed from luxury and pomp that he never went by carriage within the city, even when the weather was at its worst, but always went on foot.”

¹⁷ It is an interesting question whether this finding is mere chance or in any sense connected to the (real or imagined) Swabian penchant for frugality.

¹⁸ Barth, *Allgemeine Weltgeschichte*, 21, 53, 94, 99, 118, 137, 140, 199-200, 234, 313.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 213.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 339.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

the pious Protestant ruler, but adds, as if for the sake of honesty: “The only thing for which Duke Christopher might be reproached was that he himself was not completely free from a certain inclination to expenditure [Aufwand].” Especially, Völter explains, people complained about his “passion for building.” However, he immediately rushes to Christopher’s defense and argues that this reproach was “not completely justified,” for at the time he became duke, “after all, everything was in decay.” Finally, he remarks: “Most of all, he beautified Stuttgart through the construction of new buildings.”²² In the end, apparently, the duke’s tendency towards expensive living was not so bad after all. The charge of luxuriousness could, thus, be leveled even against the best of sovereigns, though a beloved ruler could receive a more sympathetic interpretation of his high spending. When a distinction had to be made between a legitimate pleasure on the one hand and luxury on the other, the general assessment of a person, of their character and goals in life, became an important factor. Of course, a sovereign was granted a higher standard of living than a lesser nobleman, not to speak of a craftsman or peasant. But this does not change the fact that, in principle, everyone, even the unequivocally Christian ruler, could be accused of indulging in luxurious living. There was, however, always room to make adjustments in evaluating each particular case.

A short anecdote related by Dieter Ising in his great biography of Barth’s famous friend and successor as pastor in Möttlingen, Johann Christoph Blumhardt (1805–1880), offers an excellent example of such flexibility. In the year 1851, the emotionally disturbed Princess Louise of Prussia, sister-in-law of the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm IV, spent several months in Blumhardt’s Möttlingen rectory, where she hoped to regain her health or at least improvement of her condition. Blumhardt did not want to accommodate her in his small guestroom and instead, after some reflection, let her have the marital bedroom. He also allowed himself – half financed by the royal house – the acquisition of a piano and new furniture. Such “luxury of our house for the royal person” (“Luxus unseres Hauses für die fürstliche Person”), as Blumhardt put it, caused him some inner conflict, however, since the expense was apparently at odds with his regular frugal financial habits. He finally resolved his moral conflict as follows:

I do not seek luxury . . . but I must guard myself against the obstinacy of not desiring to go beyond what is customary, even though God may lead me thither. If then I receive a princess unsought, it is the duty I owe to every person to ask myself, What can I and what must I do to serve the princess?²³

For himself, Blumhardt would have considered such costly purchases as indecent. But now, without his having a hand in the matter, a Prussian princess had come to stay at his house. We can presume that Blumhardt did not wish to offer her “luxury.” He just realistically expected that what represented luxury for him was probably still modest for the princess, or was, at any rate, only befitting her social status. By refusing to make the renovations he would have missed the chance to help and to provide a home for someone who was in need and had indeed approached him voluntarily. Blumhardt wanted to offer care and comfort not only to

²² Ludwig Völter, *Württemberg: Das Land und seine Geschichte, Ein Lese- und Lehrbuch für Volk und Jugend*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1847 [1st ed. 1839]), 182-83.

²³ Dieter Ising, *Johann Christoph Blumhardt, Life and Work: A New Biography* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), 223. The original wording can be found in the German version, Dieter Ising, *Johann Christoph Blumhardt: Leben und Werk* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 196-97.

the lower and middle classes, but to the aristocracy as well; hence, as a special exception, he justified the unusual expenditure.

The nineteenth-century Pietists, as this example shows, not only considered luxury an evil of former times. They also regarded it as an issue of pressing concern in their own day. According to Barth, contemporary luxury was “in vogue in great refinement.”²⁴ Völter, too, in referring to fashionable dress, believed that luxury had “very much gotten out of hand as of late.”²⁵ Viewed in connection with any social crisis, its detrimental effects were particularly evident to these pietistic critics.

Luxury, Social Crisis and Revolution

For many Pietists, the revolution of 1848 represented just such a social crisis. Unlike the liberal Rationalists in the Lutheran church of Württemberg, who had welcomed the revolution with great optimism, the orthodox and pietistic Lutherans had, with some exceptions, interpreted the event as catastrophic, and had seen in it a judgment from God.²⁶ In its aftermath, Sixt Carl Kapff, at the time Lutheran superintendent at Herrenberg, and from 1850 prelate at Reutlingen, who had been a conservative candidate for the National Assembly in 1848, resolved to draft a comprehensive critical analysis of what had happened. The newly established Central Committee for the Inner Mission (*Central-Ausschuß für die innere Mission*) had offered a prize for a Christian evaluation of the “contemporary social concerns” (*soziale Zeitfragen*). Kapff submitted his work, received the reward and, in 1851, published the text at Johann Hinrich Wichern’s *Agentur des Rauhen Hauses* in Hamburg. It bore the title: *The Revolution: Its Causes, Results, and Remedies* (*Die Revolution, ihre Ursachen, Folgen und Heilmittel*). In this book, Kapff describes the recent revolutionary experience as a social tragedy. Among its multiple causes, he especially singles out certain mindsets and patterns of behavior. Alongside other factors, Kapff blames “excessive luxury in all classes.”²⁷ He accuses all levels of society for cultivating excessive luxury: The upper classes (such as noblemen or high civil servants) did not content themselves with a high standard of living but always wanted more and thus wallowed in luxury. The lower classes (such as small craftsmen or servants) craved the same pleasures and soon started imitating their betters. “One should give everyone what is right, and to the higher and highest ranks more, even much more, than to the subordinate servants,” Kapff concedes, in accordance with the hierarchical order of society, adding, “but the excessively high sums only encouraged *luxury* and established it among a great, very influential class so that its general rule even among the lower classes followed as a natural consequence.”²⁸

Thus, according to Kapff, the poor, before the revolution, imitated the bad example of the rich and aimed for a lifestyle that lay far beyond what was appropriate for their social

²⁴ Barth, *Allgemeine Weltgeschichte*, 10.

²⁵ Ludwig Völter, *Geographische Beschreibung von Württemberg, hinsichtlich der Gestalt seiner Oberfläche, seiner Erzeugnisse und Bewohner: Als Grundlage des ersten geographischen Unterrichts, so wie zur Selbstbelehrung* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1836), 198.

²⁶ See Stefan J. Dietrich, *Christentum und Revolution: Die christlichen Kirchen in Württemberg 1848-1852* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1996), 15, 43-50, 60-62.

²⁷ Sixt Carl Kapff, *Die Revolution, ihre Ursachen, Folgen und Heilmittel, dargestellt für Hohe und Niedere* (Hamburg: Agentur des Rauhen Hauses, 1851), 11.

²⁸ Kapff, *Revolution*, 32.

status, and far beyond their resources.²⁹ Luxury had become endemic in society. It provoked – as if it were an act of catharsis – the “revolutionary fever” (*Revolutionsfieber*), and therefore inevitably contributed to the political and moral fiasco of 1848.³⁰ For Kapff, the good of society was at stake in this issue. Some of his Pietist friends may have had a more ambivalent view of the revolution, as Dieter Ising has shown in the case of Blumhardt.³¹ Still, they all shared Kapff’s assessment of luxury as a crisis phenomenon.

The Pietists’ Concept of “Luxury” and Its Roots

But what did Pietists such as Barth, Blumhardt, and Kapff understand by the term “luxury,” and why were they so critical of it? Generally speaking, luxury, for them, was a very intense cultivation of beautiful things for the purpose of enjoyment. This description is, of course, expansive and vague. In particular, the Pietists mention pompous architecture, select pieces of furniture, valuable jewelry, extravagant food, champagne, time-consuming and expensive hobbies and – the classic example – the ever-changing fashions of French female dress: “The girls of the manufacturing classes increasingly prefer French dress to the older, more solid clothes. In our time, an increased luxury of clothing is gaining momentum [especially] in and near cities,” in Völter’s words.³² The dislike of expensive imported luxury goods from abroad, especially from France, had already been wide-spread in the seventeenth century; it was widely shared by nineteenth-century Württemberg Pietists.³³ It seems that some even regarded the import of exotic goods itself as an expression of contemporary discontent with what divine wisdom had allocated to them; a less than enthusiastic view of France added weight to their reservations.³⁴ More generally, luxury, to them, was a pleasure-

²⁹ In a similar fashion, the *Christen-Bote*, published in Stuttgart, already lamented, in 1833, “the great decline in morals in all classes of the people, the rising luxury, the departure of so many from the sphere appropriate to their civil and economic circumstances.” “Einige Winke für die gegenwärtige Stände-Versammlung,” *Christen-Bote* 3 (1833): 14. Likewise, Ludwig Völter, “Ueber die Ursachen der großen Zahl verwahrloster Kinder in unserer Zeit: Aus einer demnächst erscheinenden Schrift über die württembergischen Kinderrettungsanstalten,” *Süddeutscher Schul-Bote* 9 (1845): 97-100, 105-08, here 99, complained that with regard to “pleasure and the luxury of dress,” one “even wishes to follow the example of the higher classes.”

³⁰ Kapff, *Revolution*, 5.

³¹ For Blumhardt’s somewhat changing perception of the revolution, see Ising, *Blumhardt, Life and Work*, 236-49. On the attitude of Württemberg churchmen (including Kapff) see Dietrich, *Christentum und Revolution*. For several figures of the German evangelical revival from different geographical and ecclesiastical backgrounds (including Barth, Kapff, and Christoph and Wilhelm Hoffmann from Württemberg [212-220]), see Nicholas M. Railton, “Evangelical Reactions to the 1848 Revolution in Germany,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 123 (2012): 195-224.

³² Völter, *Geographische Beschreibung*, 91. See also Kapff, *Revolution*, 1851, 28-31; Völter, *Württemberg*, 2nd ed., 1847, 183. Manuel Schramm, “Konsumgeschichte,” in *Dimensionen der Kultur- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, ed. Matthias Middell (Leipzig, 2007), 163-83, here 176, points out that in the nineteenth century women’s dress followed changing fashions more than men’s dress, and served as a status symbol.

³³ See Alexander Schmidt, *Vaterlandsliebe und Religionskonflikt: Politische Diskurse im Alten Reich (1555–1648)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 363: “Building on Christian criticism of luxury and a humanistic ideal of national identity, many German authors from the late 1620s on accused foreigners as well as their compatriots of introducing alien, especially French, customs, fashions, and languages. According to them, this had contributed to a decline of morals and good German customs and, above all, to a decline of the sense of unity among Germans.”

³⁴ For the way in which representatives of the German evangelical revival perceived France, see Schnurr, *Weltreiche und Wahrheitszeugen*, 235-36, 317-19. These factors are probably more important than the economic fear expressed by Leibniz and others that the luxury of French goods might draw the money out of the country (see “Luxus,” 566).

seeking and idle way of living. It very closely approximated a sin. At any rate, these Pietists linked the term *Luxus* with nouns such as *Sittenverderbniß* (“moral corruption”),³⁵ *Verschwendung* (“wastefulness”),³⁶ *Entsittlichung* (“erosion of morals”),³⁷ and *Unredlichkeit* (“dishonesty”).³⁸ The Pietists conceded that luxury formed part of cultural sophistication, which they sometimes called *Verfeinerung*, that is, refinement, and, in rare cases, pointed out some positive effects.³⁹ But the connection to high culture and sophistication did not, for them, provide serious moral justification for the pursuit of luxury.

Several reasons explain this negative assessment. First, luxury, to them, represented an *excess* of something. It goes beyond the legitimate fulfillment of a natural human desire. It stretches desire further and further away from necessity for the sheer sake of momentary pleasure, and thereby makes it unnatural. It delivers a life to an alien master: hedonism. Luxury, or “opulence” (*Ueppigkeit*), as it is also called, is to possess and to strive deliberately for more than one needs to have in order to live a fulfilled, decent and godly life.⁴⁰ Because it is an excess, it is also a waste – a waste of time, a waste of energy, and a waste of resources. It breaks the ideal of temperance, *temperantia*, and makes a man or woman smug and complacent. In other words, it directs his or her interest towards aesthetics instead of ethics, and towards this world instead of the world to come. Luxury, thus, produces a worldly mindset. It even fosters addiction: The Württemberg Pietists thought that people could become addicted to ever more superficial pleasures and would lose the power to curb their appetites. The term *Genußsucht* (literally, an “addiction to pleasure”) was therefore sometimes used as a quasi-synonym for *Luxus*. As Christians, the Pietists regarded such an addiction to pleasure as a big step on the slippery slope towards what the Bible calls the “works of the flesh” (Gal 5:19), such as sexual immorality, debauchery, and drunkenness. Because luxury consumes large amounts of money, it also easily leads to miserliness and avarice, two further vices condemned by the New Testament. This slippery slope is what Völter hinted at when he asked: “Do not self-indulgence [Genußsucht] and luxuriance [Ueppigkeit] squander what avarice [Habsucht] had gained?”⁴¹ Avarice holds back what should be given; self-indulgence spends what should be kept. Thus, a life of luxury seemed to Pietists like Völter very far from the biblical ideal.

The basis of the Pietist criticism of luxury, however, was not exclusively biblical. A non-religious preference for simplicity and austerity lay behind it, too. This ideal can be traced far back into antiquity. It can, for instance, be found in the Cynics, in Plato, Tacitus, Cicero, and Seneca.⁴² In its modern form, it may in part be traced back to the Biedermeier mentality and to nineteenth-century middle-class ethic. Some popular writings on lifestyle

³⁵ Barth, *Allgemeine Weltgeschichte*, 137.

³⁶ Völter, “Über die Ursachen,” 99.

³⁷ Barth, quoted in Karl Werner, *Christian Gottlob Barth, Doktor der Theologie, nach seinem Leben und Wirken gezeichnet* (Calw: Vereinsbuchhandlung, Stuttgart: Steinkopf, 1866), 2: 328.

³⁸ Kapff, *Revolution*, 10.

³⁹ Barth, *Allgemeine Weltgeschichte*, 10, 199. Similarly, the inspector of the Basel Mission, a native of Württemberg, Christian Gottlieb Blumhardt, *Versuch einer allgemeinen Missionsgeschichte der Kirche Christi* (Basel: Neukirch, 1828), 1: 509-10.

⁴⁰ Barth, *Allgemeine Weltgeschichte*, 21, 94; Völter, *Württemberg*, 183; Kapff, *Revolution*, 28.

⁴¹ Völter, “Über die Ursachen,” 99.

⁴² See Georg Bollenbeck, *Eine Geschichte der Kulturkritik: Von Rousseau bis Günther Anders* (Munich: Beck, 2007), 38-39.

and manners expressed similar feelings.⁴³ But an element of Romanticism existed in it, too. Like all romantic-conservative authors of their day, the Pietist pastors believed that the augmentation of bodily desires would lead to cultural decay.⁴⁴ A simple, unrefined, and down-to-earth life seemed to them superior to a civilized comfortable one that demands little effort and permits every pleasure. Luxury, in the view of the Württemberg Pietists, could quickly develop into the vice of softness (*Verweichlichung*). “Luxury enervates and softens,” Barth writes.⁴⁵ What he meant by this becomes clear from his praise of the opposite concept, the “old rough simplicity.”⁴⁶ Barth found this virtue in the ancient Romans of the earlier period, who remained devoted to manual labor and agriculture and eschewed trade. A life of comfort weakens a people’s character, so the argument went, it destroys its vitality and reduces its fighting power. People who no longer have to struggle for the bare necessities of life, whose character is no longer strengthened by work and privation, quickly lose their sense of traditions and values, and their practical, down-to-earth disposition.⁴⁷ They also become alienated from nature. In an 1859 article on the millennium, Barth points out that the Old Testament prophet Micah (4:4) predicted that everyone would one day sit under his own vine and under his own fig-tree. He concludes, then, that “current luxurious lifestyles do not correspond to this prophecy; living conditions must once more become much simpler and more in tune with nature. There are, therefore, great changes in the offing.”⁴⁸ Barth’s eschatological expectation almost sounds like a call “back to nature.”

Did the Pietists therefore propagate a bucolic ideal? Did they preach the vision of a primitive life close to nature? Not quite. Significant though it is, the Romantic element in their thinking must not be over-emphasized. The Pietist authors did not advocate cultural primitivism; indeed, they valued civilization. They even, in other contexts, talked about “savage” or “barbarian” nations to describe cultural deficiencies.⁴⁹ Unlike *Luxus*, “culture” (*Cultur*) was not a bad word for the “awakened” Württemberg pastors. Many of them, after all, had received a broad education in their youth, which they still appreciated. Also, their own brand of Christianity, and especially its view of original sin, kept them from accepting, or propagating the myth of the noble savage. To quote Barth once more: “the luxury of riches and the innocence of the simple life of a shepherd . . . all have in turn been suggested and tried as a cure for mankind, and have not worked.”⁵⁰ Salvation, for Barth, as for all the Pietists, was not found in a simple lifestyle that harmonizes with nature but in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. None of these writers left any doubt about the primacy of the Christian faith in their thinking. Still, their openness to the romantic sentiment intensified their criticism of luxury; as did their reluctance to welcome the alleged “progress” (*Fortschritt*) that their

⁴³ An example of this in Württemberg were the *Hausregeln* (“house rules”) of the pastor and educator Johann Friedrich Flattich (1713–1797), which were reprinted in the nineteenth century. On Flattich, see Hermann Ehmer, *Johann Friedrich Flattich: Der schwäbische Salomo: Eine Biographie* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1997).

⁴⁴ See van der Pot, *Bewertung des technischen Fortschritts*, 2: 1020.

⁴⁵ Barth, *Allgemeine Weltgeschichte*, 53.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴⁷ This is one of several reasons why the Pietists had no taste for a bohemian lifestyle. They did not reject intellectual work or creativity as such, as their admiration for several scholars, artists, and musicians reveals.

⁴⁸ Christian Gottlob Barth (anon.), “Ein Blick in das verheiene Friedensreich,” *Sammlungen für Liebhaber christlicher Wahrheit und Gottseligkeit* (1859), 225–38, here 234.

⁴⁹ Barth, *Allgemeine Weltgeschichte*, 44, 206–07.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 363.

contemporaries so frequently hailed.⁵¹ People who cannot observe new technological advances without a worried look at the dark side, anti-Christian side-effects and the breach with tradition, also usually preserve a good dose of skepticism about the modern comforts and distractions, and the luxury of their age.

Luxury and Pauperism

Social reality seemed to speak in favor of the pietistic views. If early industrialization enabled some to afford unlimited luxury, it did not prevent its economic downside: *pauperism*. In spite of technological achievements, the decades before 1850 experienced what historian Heinz-Gerhard Haupt calls “a phase of undernourishment and malnutrition” in Europe.⁵² Despite the promise for the future, early industrialization weakened traditional social bonds, worsened working conditions, and could not yet overcome the results of rapid population increase, unemployment, and the poor harvests of the 1840s. Pietism was very much aware of the misery caused by these changes, and many of the Württemberg pastors were actively involved in private charities, orphanages, deaconesses’ homes, and other initiatives of the Inner Mission. Pietists recognized that many families lived considerably below the poverty level. In 1845, Völter, a protagonist of the Württemberg *Rettungshaus* (orphanage) movement, wrote an article “On the Causes of the Great Number of Neglected Children in our Time.” In this article, he warned that the widening gap between the rich and the poor might erupt in a new kind of Peasants’ War as it had in the sixteenth century.⁵³

Against this background of great social misery, which some Pietists vividly described, luxury seemed all the more shocking and outrageous. “Oh, what would have to be told”, Kapff complains

*of the harshness towards the poor, the stinginess towards the needy, the accumulation of capital in the face of starving and moaning families, the luxury of all kinds alongside half naked people suffering want? . . . Ten gowns are stored in their cabinet, but they refuse the poor man who asks for one.*⁵⁴

For the Pietists, such display of luxury within a context of social misery was nothing less than failure to render assistance to those in need. In their view, society’s wealth was limited; those who took more than their share deprived the rest of their needs. Kapff related the story of a nobleman who had sixteen horses and three carriages, and asks, “How many of the poor could eat their fill every day if he had kept only four instead of sixteen horses!”⁵⁵

Kapff did not believe that luxury produced any positive economic effects. Instead, he even regarded it as a cause of the rising number of bankruptcies alongside greed, dishonesty, and stock-market speculation.⁵⁶ What Sabine Holtz observes for early modern Protestant sermons also applies to the texts of nineteenth-century Württemberg Pietists examined here: none believed that individual self-interest and luxury might serve rather than harm the common good.⁵⁷ Rather, for Pietists, the damage done by luxury to society and to the

⁵¹ See Schnurr, *Weltreiche und Wahrheitszeugen*, 174-75.

⁵² Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, *Konsum und Handel: Europa im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 35.

⁵³ Völter, “Ueber die Ursachen,” 106.

⁵⁴ Kapff, *Revolution*, 31.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁷ Sabine Holtz, *Theologie und Alltag: Lehre und Leben in den Predigten der Tübinger Theologen 1550–1750* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 228: “This subject is ignored by the preachers.”

individual, was unambiguous. It was even harmful to the rich themselves, as even the wealthy, indolent baron in Kapff's study of the revolution of 1848 realized:

Getting up at 10 o'clock in the morning, drinking coffee, reading the newspaper, having lunch, going for a drive, dinner party in the evening – this is my day-to-day routine, and my heart remains empty, and I don't know why I'm here.

“How satisfied,” Kapff remarked, “his heart would become if he worked, relieved distress, [and] contributed to the improvement of his people's condition!”⁵⁸ The Pietists believed that the rich would be much happier if they shed their luxurious lifestyles. But they continued to lead destructive indolent and luxurious lives thus also stimulating the bad instincts of the poor. Kapff recalled that, during the dearth, a confectioner (*Zuckerbäcker*) was asked how he could still sell his sweets at such a time. The confectioner answered that the begging children were his best customers.⁵⁹ They wasted the little that generous people had given them on satisfying their greed. For Kapff, this served as an example of the devastating effects of luxury especially in a time of need. Barth shared this sentiment. Criticizing recent developments in his own congregation in Möttlingen, in 1836 he observed that “Impoverishment is on the increase – and so are, in the same degree, the erosion of morals and luxury.”⁶⁰ For Barth, pauperization and luxury went hand-in-hand. Both were symptoms of decline.

Luxury and Eschatology

As Christians interested in salvation history, these authors interpreted such markers of decline in eschatological terms. Referring to a famous New Testament motif (Mt 16:3), they called them *Zeichen der Zeit*, signs of the time. Among these signs were religious, social, political and moral tendencies of the day that seemed to indicate the dramatic nature of the present and its proximity to the end-times. The cult of luxury was one of them. In a circular correspondence between several of these Pietist pastors, one of Barth's colleagues, in 1844, described the great poverty of one part of humanity alongside the greatest luxury of the other part as a sign of the times.⁶¹ Opponents of the Pietists sometimes mocked them for this concept. The Hegelian Christian Märklin (1807–1849), a theological radical and friend of David Friedrich Strauß, wrote a book entitled *Description and Critique of Modern Pietism* (*Darstellung und Kritik des modernen Pietismus*), in which he criticizes Sixt Carl Kapff for lumping diverse modern phenomena together and ascribing an eschatological meaning to them: Hegel, Goethe, the *Junges Deutschland*, France and its novels, work on Sundays, industrialization, the love of pleasure and luxury. The Pietists traced all these back to the spirit of antichrist, Märklin observed with noticeable contempt.⁶² According to Märklin, Pietists demonized this world far too much. They even considered art (*Kunst*) to be an “idle, superfluous luxury,” he complains.⁶³

⁵⁸ Kapff, *Revolution*, 29.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Werner, *Barth*, 328.

⁶¹ Quoted in Michael Kannenberg, *Verschleierte Uhrtafeln: Endzeiterwartungen im württembergischen Pietismus zwischen 1818 und 1848* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 300.

⁶² Christian Märklin, *Darstellung und Kritik des modernen Pietismus: Ein wissenschaftlicher Versuch* (Stuttgart, 1839), 167-68n.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 215n.

Conclusion and Epilogue

This criticism was not altogether untrue; but it was not wholly justified either. The Pietists did not regard all art as luxury, just as they did not regard other worldly pleasures *per se* as luxury. Enjoyment, they thought, was a part of creation that they accepted, and even valued, as God-given. But they feared that it could easily *become* a luxury, and thereby distort its *raison d'être*, namely to glorify God. They did not oppose meeting one's needs, but argued that satisfying one's desires as an end in itself, as a philosophy of life, was dangerous. In fact, they thought of this danger sooner than their contemporaries did—hence, their skepticism concerning theatre, games, and fashion. It is possible that, by taking this position, the Pietists underestimated the value of earthly pleasures and regarded things as a luxury that could have found their proper place in a worldview based on the Bible and the Reformation. Perhaps luxury did not always begin where they, at times somewhat fearfully or stereotypically, discovered it. One might even wonder if the long-term social impact of the revival movement might not have been even more considerable than it actually was had its stance on the usefulness of art, literature, technology and some other forms of modern culture been more unambiguously affirmative. Informed though it was, the Pietists' social criticism was not always sophisticated or balanced, and was sometimes overtaken by history. In addition, an in-depth knowledge of economics, especially relating to the interconnectedness of free trade, consumption, economic growth, and living standards, would have enriched and possibly qualified their criticism of luxury.

Nevertheless, it did not require the modern global financial and the euro-zone debt crises to understand the appeal of a call to a simpler life of contentment, a life lived in the service of God and others, with a concern not only for earthly, but also heavenly things, as something valuable and worthy of consideration. Despite their political narrowness, these warnings against a hedonistic approach to life and against indifference to other people's misery were not at all far-fetched. In a time of growing impoverishment in Germany, such concerns were quite relevant. And today, too, as we face abject poverty in some parts of the world, a lack of sustainability in our way of living and declining interest in matters of faith in the richer European nations, these warnings may not be irrelevant. The Württemberg Pietists, at any rate, would have seen it this way. This is why they were suspicious of luxurious living. If the individual and if society were not careful, they believed, the excessive pursuit of pleasure would seduce people into setting the wrong priorities. It was above all this strong fear of the disastrous results a pursuit of luxury portended that caused them to speak out so vehemently against it.

Bibliography

- Barth, Christian Gottlob. *Die allgemeine Weltgeschichte nach biblischen Grundsätzen bearbeitet für nachdenksame Leser*. Calw: Vereinsbuchhandlung, Stuttgart, 1837.
- Bernhardt, Rainer. *Luxuskritik und Aufwandsbeschränkungen in der griechischen Welt*. Stuttgart, 2003.
- Blumhardt, Christian Gottlieb. *Versuch einer allgemeinen Missionsgeschichte der Kirche Christi*. Basel, 1828.

- Bollenbeck, Georg. *Eine Geschichte der Kulturkritik: Von Rousseau bis Günther Anders*. Munich, 2007.
- Brecht, Martin. "Das Aufkommen der neuen Frömmigkeitsbewegung in Deutschland." In *Geschichte des Pietismus*, Martin Brecht, ed. Göttingen, 1993.
- Corbier, Mireille. "Luxus." *Der Neue Pauly*, 7 (1999): 534-36.
- Dietrich, Stefan J. *Christentum und Revolution: Die christlichen Kirchen in Württemberg 1848-1852*. Paderborn, 1996.
- Ehmer, Hermann. *Johann Friedrich Flattich: Der schwäbische Salomo: Eine Biographie*. Stuttgart, 1997.
- Elert, Werner. *Morphologie des Luthertums, 2: Soziallehren und Sozialwirkungen des Luthertums*. Reprint; Munich, 1953.
- Haupt, Heinz-Gerhard. *Konsum und Handel: Europa im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*. Göttingen, 2003.
- Holtz, Sabine. *Theologie und Alltag: Lehre und Leben in den Predigten der Tübinger Theologen 1550–1750*. Tübingen, 1993.
- Ising, Dieter. *Johann Christoph Blumhardt, Life and Work: A New Biography*. Eugene, 2009.
- Kannenberg, Michael. *Verschleierte Uhrtafeln: Endzeiterwartungen im württembergischen Pietismus zwischen 1818 und 1848*. Göttingen, 2007.
- Kapff, Sixt Carl. *Die Revolution, ihre Ursachen, Folgen und Heilmittel, dargestellt für Hohe und Niedere*. Hamburg, 1851.
- Kuhn, Thomas K. *Religion und neuzeitliche Gesellschaft: Studien zum sozialen und diakonischen Handeln in Pietismus, Aufklärung und Erweckungsbewegung*. Tübingen, 2003.
- Märklin, Christian. *Darstellung und Kritik des modernen Pietismus: Ein wissenschaftlicher Versuch*. Stuttgart, 1839.
- Muehlmann, Horst. "Luxus und Komfort: Wortgeschichte und Wortvergleich." PhD diss., Bonn University, 1975.
- Pot, Johan Hendrik Jacob van der. *Die Bewertung des technischen Fortschritts: Eine systematische Übersicht der Theorien*. Assen, 1985.
- Railton, Nicholas M. "Evangelical Reactions to the 1848 Revolution in Germany." *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 123 (2012): 195-224.
- Schmidt, Alexander. *Vaterlandsliebe und Religionskonflikt: Politische Diskurse im Alten Reich (1555–1648)*. Leiden, 2007.
- Schnell, Rüdiger. *Frauendiskurs, Männerdiskurs, Ehediskurs: Textsorten und Geschlechterkonzepte in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*. Frankfurt and New York, 1998.
- Schnurr, Jan Carsten. *Weltreiche und Wahrheitszeugen: Geschichtsbilder der protestantischen Erweckungsbewegung in Deutschland 1815–1848*. Göttingen, 2011.
- Schramm, Manuel. "Konsumgeschichte." In *Dimensionen der Kultur- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, Matthias Middell, ed. Leipzig, 2007.
- Shovlin, John. *The Political Economy of Virtue: Luxury, Patriotism, and the Origins of the French Revolution*. Ithaca, 2006.

- Völter, Ludwig. *Geographische Beschreibung von Württemberg, hinsichtlich der Gestalt seiner Oberfläche, seiner Erzeugnisse und Bewohner: Als Grundlage des ersten geographischen Unterrichts, so wie zur Selbstbelehrung*. Stuttgart, 1836.
- Völter, Ludwig. *Württemberg: Das Land und seine Geschichte, Ein Lese- und Lehrbuch für Volk und Jugend*, 2nd edition. Stuttgart, 1847.
- Werner, Karl. *Christian Gottlob Barth, Doktor der Theologie, nach seinem Leben und Wirken gezeichnet*. Calw: Vereinsbuchhandlung, Stuttgart, 1866.
- Wyrwa, Ulrich. "Luxus und Konsum: Begriffsgeschichtliche Aspekte." In *Luxus und Konsum: Eine historische Annäherung*, Reinhold Reith and Torsten Meyer, eds. Münster, 2003.